TEACHING ENGLISH

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EDITORIAL

We imagine that a good many of our readers follow with interest, as we do, the various discussions which take place and are reported by the Press from time to time on the place of English in India. That the subject arouses a great deal of interest is obvious from the number of articles dealing with it published by educational journals and the abundance of letters appearing in the correspondence columns of newspapers.

The general impression that one gets from these various sources is that there has been a very significant change in the attitude of the nation's leaders, both political and educational, towards the question of the place of English in the life of India. Immediately after Independence, there was a perhaps natural desire to minimise the importance of English and to reduce drastically the time devoted to the study of it. The desire was closely linked to the widely felt need for a national language, more easily accessible to the ordinary Indian, both townsman and villager, to whom English had never been a medium of communication. But as time passed, as the implications and consequences of this attitude became apparent, and as feelings subsided, other counsels began to prevail. It is neither our business nor our purpose to discuss the future of the national language and of the various vigorous regional languages of India, but we are interested in the fate of the English language which has played so important a part in the life of the country.

One of the factors which have obviously contributed to this change of attitude which we believe to be taking place is the importance which English has acquired in the field of higher education in this country, an importance which is still apparent and which will continue to be so until efficient substitutes for it become available. During the present period of expansion of India's economy, there will be great need for trained scientists and technicians of every kind, and English has a very real contribution to make to the efficient training of the men and women upon whom responsibility for the country's progress will in part rest.

But if the importance of English in the field of advanced studies is admitted, then obviously attention must be paid to the teaching of English in the High Schools. One constantly hears complaint by members of College Staffs that students entering the Universities

to-day possess a very inadequate grasp of English and find it increasingly difficult to use the language for purposes of comprehension and expression. The fault would seem to lie partly with the schools, which often teach the wrong things, and partly with the Universities, which often expect the wrong things. In schools too much attention is often paid to grammatical niceties and to literary appreciation, and this mistaken approach is frequently perpetuated in the compulsory English Courses at Universities. There is need for re-orientation, both at the High School and at the University level, and there is also need for co-operation between School and University authorities in deciding what level of achievement in English is desirable and feasible.

As we have pointed out, one of the most disturbing factors in the present situation is uncertainty in the minds of teachers and students about the future of English in India This is evident when one considers the relative importance attributed to the study of English in the various States; in Madras six years are considered necessary, whereas in Bombay four are thought sufficient. It is to be expected that the report of the Language Commission will help to decide this issue in such a way that some uniform pattern will be adopted throughout the country, which would make it possible to attack problems of syllabuses and methods on a nation-wide basis. For this and other reasons, we await the report with the greatest interest.

ENGLISH BY RADIO

English by Radio lessons are broadcast daily from Mondays to Fridays by the BBC Far Eastern Station. They can be heard by listeners in India from 2100-2115 IST in the 16 metre band.

For Urdu-speaking listeners there is a weekly transmission from London in the BBC's Urdu programme. 'Radio se Angrezi' is broadcast from 2030-2045 IST on Saturdays in the 13 and 16 metre bands and relayed by the BBC Far Eastern Station in the 16 metre band.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE JUNIOR INTERMEDIATE OR PRE-UNIVERSITY YEAR

BY S. H. BEST

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WHEN the students first assemble at the beginning of their university career the only knowledge the teachers have of their attainment in English is based on the S.S.L.C. results. The lowest marks may be 35 per cent. These results, however, cannot at present be considered reliable, for the marks may not reflect the students' actual attainment, but rather reliance on model answers prepared in class and memorised or on bazaar texts. This position may well change with the introduction of a new type of S.S.L.C. examination paper in English, but we cannot now consider the S.S.L.C. results an accurate guide to attainment.

It follows that the first task of the teachers must be to test attainment in the four main skills of language learning which are, in order of increasing difficulty :—

1. Comprehension of the written word.
2. Comprehension of the spoken word.
3. Speaking.
4. Writing.

There is no need to award marks, for the aim of the test is not to place the students in any exact order of merit but rather to give the teacher a general idea of attainment so that he can frame his scheme of work for the year. He should aim at dividing the class into three or four groups, according to attainment. He may find that he can put the best group to work without much supervision, for they can soon be brought to understand the method of independent investigation, which is one of the aims of university education. The weaker groups will need special attention and supervision.

Test 1.

To test comprehension of the written word it is necessary to give the students a number of passages to read silently in class. These passages should be chosen as likely to be interesting to students who have just left secondary school and should be based on a vocabulary of not more than 2000 words. A good variety of passages should be chosen, for there is no reason why all the

students should read the same passage so long as all the passages use roughly the same vocabulary. The testing of comprehension can best be done orally although tests confined to a single word answer should not be ruled out. A demand for longer written answers destroys the value of the test, for it confuses the simplest and the most difficult of the tests. If comprehension is tested orally the mother tongue or English can be used, or passages may be dramatised in the mother tongue or English, or students may be asked to mime. A discreet use of the mother tongue may reveal how much of the student's English vocabulary is passive and how much is active, but the teacher must be careful to see that the test does not become a translation exercise, which is altogether a different matter.

Test 2.

This test can be made to follow naturally from the first. Instead of the students being asked to read a passage for themselves they will listen to the teacher reading and then the same sort of testing will follow. This test places a great responsibility on the teacher, who must read well. A gramophone record can be used but this may be found to be more difficult for the students, who do not have the stimulus of seeing the reader. The passages should be simpler in vocabulary than those chosen for the first test, because the students have time for reflection when reading but not when listening.

Test 3.

Some work on the third skill, speaking, may already have been done during the first two tests, if the students have shown themselves willing to use the language. It is not necessary to test the students' skill in the use of grammatical constructions and they should not be asked about the mechanics of language. Formal grammar has no place at this stage. The teacher needs to have the grammar book in order to make sure that he has tested systematically the students' ability to use orally all the main constructions, but he should not confuse the students' minds with a discussion of theory.

Test 4.

The three foregoing tests are all oral, and indeed much of the work in this year must be oral. Oral proficiency precedes written proficiency if the language is well taught, for the latter depends on the former. Oral work is lively and interesting to the students, and makes for quicker thought and readier speech.

It gives the students confidence in the use of the language. The teacher should not spend much time in the correction of mistakes at this stage, for that is to be an important part of his work during the rest of the year.

The written test should arise naturally from the preceding ones and should maintain the interest. The students should not look on it as an examination. It may be the writing of a short letter, or short answers to a dozen questions. The test must not be beyond the students' capacity. They should not, for example, be asked to produce two pages of an essay, for it is better to have 50 words of good English than 500 words of bad English. The written work should have been discussed previously in class and be based on subjects suggested by the students. The teacher must remember that he is testing the students' ability to write English, not their capacity for original thought.

Assessing Results

It is desirable that one class should be tested by one teacher but impressions should be recorded for the benefit of those other members of the staff who may be teaching the class later. A staff meeting should be called for a discussion of the tests and their results.

Classes can now be divided into groups, though this division should not be rigid. The good students should meet together so that they may stimulate each other, but occasionally they can be used as assistants and can do practice work with one group while the teacher is busy with one of the others. Such co-operative work has valuable social results, and helps the able as much as the weak. It should be an essential part of class work.

One valuable result of this testing is that the teachers will very quickly come to know their students as individuals. Education is largely a matter of human relationships and the quicker the teachers know their students the more quickly can they teach them. It is difficult to do this when the students spend most of their time sitting at desks and passively listening, but it is easy if the teacher has had the opportunity of watching them dramatise, of listening to their discussions or of accompanying them on educational excursions and so forth.

The result of this preliminary investigation of the students' total attainment in English will probably be to confirm the Secondary Education Commission's opinion that "methods of education in use are still dominated by routine. There is still too much cramming and the teaching in the school is not related to life, nor is there any attempt to check deterioration of

standards of expression in speech and writing." If this is found to be the case it follows naturally that the university teachers must adopt the changes recommended by the Commission when they are dealing with their first-year students, for soon these students will be in the higher secondary schools. To quote the report further: "The business of the teacher should be to re-establish the link between life and knowledge, to share the aims and objects of teaching with his pupils and to plan the programme of work in such a way that pupils will have varied and ample opportunities for self-expression in speech, writing, collective reading, independent research, constructive activities and other projects that bring the hand and mind into fruitful co-operation."

Planning the Programme

The teacher can now settle down to plan a detailed programme of work for the year. He knows the students' capacity and can gauge the probable progress of each group. His main aim will be to give the students plenty of oral practice, for that is the fundamental activity of language learning. To support this, he needs to explore thoroughly the students' interests and environment. Written work will probably have to be reduced to a minimum, until such time as the students have attained far greater fluency in speech. Because examinations need to be closely related to the scheme of work, it follows that for the first two terminal examinations at least there should be little written work: the teacher's judgment of the students will be based mainly on their oral work.

Interests and Environment

The teacher now has two main fields in which to work. He can explore the students' interests and exploit their new environment. These students have come from a variety of homes and a variety of schools, and they can easily be encouraged to talk in English of their homes and schools. They are often strangers to each other and are glad of this opportunity of getting to know each other. And further, as they are all in this environment the teacher has the great opportunity of introducing the college to the students and this should be one of his first activities.

It is desirable that the students should be proud of their college and university, and should know something of their history and achievements. The Principal can be asked to visit each class to talk about the college and to answer questions. The library should be thoroughly explored and the co-operation

here of the librarian will be invaluable. Heads of other departments can be invited to speak, as their duties allow, on the work on which they are engaged, but they must be asked to do so in simple, non-technical English. The Physical Education Director is potentially a great ally, for sport is often a common bond amongst students and they will be glad to hear of the prowess of their seniors and predecessors.

As long as English is the medium of instruction in colleges, the teachers of English have helpers throughout the staff, and it is important that full use should be made of this potential co-operation. They should have some knowledge of the text-books written in English and used by other departments, and they should encourage the students to discuss those subjects during the English periods. There is no reason why the keen science student should not talk of his latest enthusiasm in science, or the student of an Indian literature tell of that in an English lesson. There is a great need to prevent overmuch departmentalising of knowledge, and if the English lesson can act as a link between various other subjects, so much the better.

Students should be encouraged to join associations, and in particular the English Association. They should be shown what a chairman's duties are and should be shown also how to make a brief speech introducing a visitor. Similarly, they should be shown how to propose a vote of thanks. They should be discouraged from using flowery language. As their proficiency grows they should be given opportunities to exercise these skills. The aim should be that when a distinguished visitor visits the college to address the students, all the work of introducing and entertaining should be undertaken by the students themselves. They will learn to carry responsibility only by being allowed responsibility.

Reading

This oral work must be supported by much reading in English and this can be considered under three heads: (a) detailed reading, (b) non-detailed, and (c) general reading.

By detailed reading is not meant detailed textual study. If students learn a part in a play, that is detailed reading. If they learn a poem for use as Choral Speech, that is also detailed reading. Every effort should be made to avoid the mechanical examination of the words of a text. The teacher can select a passage, e.g., a poem in strongly rhythmical verse like one of Browning's "Cavalier Lyrics", read it several times aloud to the class or play it on a gramophone record so that the students

enjoy the sound of it. Any explanation of difficult words must follow this enjoyment of the sound, and will probably arise naturally enough from a discussion of the poem. The final work may be memorisation either for individual recitation or for choral speech. Passages from great speeches, e.g., Lincoln's Gettysburg address, may be used in the same manner. But the readiest way of conducting detailed reading is by the use of drama, which gives most useful practice in good dialogue and in fine language. Such dramatic work may either be with set texts, e.g., extracts from Shakespeare, or one-act plays, or maybe in little dramas worked up by the students themselves from their own reading in English or the mother tongue, from their own experience at home, on excursions etc., or from the exercise of their imaginations.

The basis of the choice of texts for non-detailed reading should be the value of the book in enlarging the students' experience through the exercise of the imagination and the extension of their vocabularies. Before the students read a book, the teacher needs to bring within the range of the students' experience those ideas contained in the book which will be new to them, and in discussing these ideas he will begin the work of extending their vocabularies. The students should then be asked to read the books, partly in their own time and partly by silent reading in class. (Some students do not know how to read and need some guidance on the proper use of books.) The next step is a series of lively discussions of the ideas contained in the book. From these more work will develop, e.g., excursions to places which illustrate the ideas, the collection of supplementary information from other books, the preparation of reports in dialogue or drama form, or, with the abler students, in writing. The final step may be the visual presentation of the total impact of the book in the form of an exhibition, or as a drama or as a discussion amongst a group of students. It cannot be too much emphasized that the teacher's task is not to engage in a detailed interpretation of the text but to help the students to make a direct and personal contact with the ideas and language of the book.

It would be deplorable if at the end of their first university year the students had not been encouraged to undertake wide reading in English. The complaint is often heard that an overcrowded syllabus does not give the students any opportunity for casual reading, but if wide reading is an aim of university education it follows that the syllabus needs to be simplified, at least in this first year. The students should look to their depart-

mental library to supply their needs for general reading. There are now plenty of simplified texts available and these should be ready to the student's hand. The teachers should not ask for more information than the names of the books read, so that they are able at the end of the year to review each student's total reading in English. The texts should contain simple versions of such English classics as the novels of Scott and Dickens, but also such modern works as Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Hilton's *Lost Horizon*.

Special Drills

Though a great part of the work will be oral composition and reading, there will be a need of special drill in the use of English, particularly with the weaker groups. Amongst the books most useful for such work are Allen's *Living English Structure* (Longmans) and Hornby's *Composition Exercises in Elementary English* (Macmillan). Similarly, drill in correct intonation and pronunciation should not be neglected. Useful speech records are available for this purpose.

Writing

It has already been suggested that at first the amount of writing should be reduced. What writing is required should arise naturally from other work. Students should be shown how to make notes both from books and from their own observation. They should then be shown how to summarise a speech or a progression of events. Letter-writing is an invaluable exercise, e.g., the students can write letters asking about the possibility of an educational visit, and when it is over they can write the letter of thanks. Group composition is often of more value educationally than a series of poor individual essays, for the abler help the weak. The formal essay should be avoided, for it is a difficult form of expression and beyond the capacity of most first-year students.

Sessional Examination

As promotion will depend on this examination it will need to be more formal than the preceding terminal examinations, but it need not be exclusively a written examination. To the marks awarded for the written test should be added the teacher's estimates of oral work throughout the term and of the student's general reading and skill in independent research. Promotion should be on the advance in the four main skills and not exclusively on skill in writing. It is probable that the examina-

tion should not be much more advanced than S.S.L.C. but now the pass marks in English might well be raised to 80 per cent.

Results

It is realised that a programme such as the one outlined above makes a greater demand on the teachers than the routine methods so often adopted. But as it is evident that an improvement in standards can only be effected by a change in method, the effort to make the change is incumbent on all teachers. The benefits will be many. The teachers and students will enjoy their work far more and will find themselves in a far more fruitful relationship to each other. Problems of discipline will disappear, for when students find themselves actively engaged in rewarding work they exert their own discipline on any colleague who tries to interrupt. The change of method will not only improve the students' English but will also enrich them emotionally and intellectually. They will learn how to discover knowledge for themselves, and that will prove invaluable in a rapidly changing India where facts become all too speedily out of date. They will gain in self-knowledge and in knowledge of others, so being better able to tolerate and understand opinion which differs from their own and to co-operate fully in a democratic society. They will face their future university career with far greater confidence in themselves and in their teachers.

INCREASING ONE'S VOCABULARY

By Dr. Shiv K. Kumar

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The importance of increasing one's vocabulary is never fully stressed by the teachers of English in Indian schools or colleges. The teacher, who is primarily concerned with paraphrase, explanation, or commentary, seldom goes into the detailed process of replacing difficult words by simpler ones. The various shades of meaning represented by different words of *almost* similar connotation are never completely brought out as a result of which precision in expression remains an impossibility. It is, therefore, imperative that great emphasis should be laid not only on synonyms and antonyms, but also on the general improvement of a student's vocabulary. How often does a teacher come across a school or college essay in which certain words are repeated *ad*

nauseam, revealing great poverty of thought and expression. For instance, a student writing a short essay on "My Ambition in Life" is most likely to set off in haphazard style repeating the word *doctor* (if he chooses the medical profession) after every second or third sentence. His range of vocabulary seldom includes such words as *surgeon, physician, consultant, specialist, chemist, apothecary, quack, pharmacopolist, oculist, aurist, operator or psychiatrist*—words which not only lend variety of presentation to the subject, but also open up new avenues of thought.

How can a student, then, improve his vocabulary? It is very difficult to prescribe any formal procedure for the art of learning new words. Every student has to work out his own method, because a plan would largely depend upon his peculiar temperament or disposition. Whereas a disciplined mind may find it possible to stop at each new word to look it up in the dictionary, another student, rather passively inclined, may prefer to wait till he has finished a chapter, section, or part. Besides, so much depends upon the nature of the books we take up to read. An extremely engaging story is likely to transport a student into complete indifference towards all thoughts of increasing his word-power, whereas a dull and formal essay may sometimes be usefully turned into a pleasant pastime of word-hunting. It may, however, be laid down as a general rule that, as far as possible, a student should never let any strange word pass unchallenged. It is always wiser to look it up at the moment of meeting it.

(A) Our next problem is how to become completely familiar with a new word. Is it just enough to look it up in a dictionary and note its meaning in a scrap-book? We shall soon see that this is a very defective method. Unless a student can use a newly-learnt word in his normal speech or writing, it will always remain unfamiliar. To assimilate a strange word into our vocabulary, we must learn it in the following three stages:

(a) We must find out its precise meaning from a standard dictionary (e.g. *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*)
(b) We must reproduce the original sentence in which this word has been used by the author
(c) We must frame new sentences, illustrating the use of this word.

Example: *Scrummage*

(a) a general fight or tussle—a term derived from Rugby football: a closing-in of rival forwards round the ball on the ground —another form: *scrimmage.*

(b) "This turned into a general *scrummage* as the result of

which seven persons of the village were killed..." (Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook,* p. 203).

(c) "When the wedding-procession reached the main crossing, the bridegroom's father started throwing coins to the street beggars, which resulted in a general *scrummage*..."

(B) Another method of increasing one's store of words is to dawdle occasionally over the dictionary. A rich harvest can be reaped even by a random glance through the pages of *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* or Webster's *International Dictionary,* wherein one may find both the meaning of a word and examples of its use by famous writers.

(C) Roget's *Thesaurus* of words and phrases is another rich reservoir of useful words in their associative contexts of phrases, idioms and synonyms. Frequent use of this remarkable book can enable a student to achieve depth, precision, variety and novelty in thought and expression. For instance, a word like "impossible" from the general index at the end (Pt. 2) would refer us to a host of interesting permutations and combinations in which the idea of "impossibility, infeasibility or impracticability" could be felicitously expressed. To select only a few associated phrases: "to square the circle, to discover the philosopher's stone, to discover the elixir of life, to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, to weave a rope of sand, to build castles in the air, to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, to set the Thames on fire, to catch a weasel asleep, etc." Although quite a number of similar books have now flooded the market, Roget's *Thesaurus* still remains supreme for its immense usefulness and importance to any writer of English.

Words have power, colour, sound, poise and balance—nay, even weight or smell. They can be boorish or bellicose, or elegant, sensitive and tolerant. To learn and assimilate only three new words a day, so that their use will not betray any stiffness or awkwardness, is to guarantee a rich vocabulary before one reaches middle age.

COMPOSITION

By J. G. Bruton

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Let me make it clear from the outset that in my opinion any form of writing in English can be considered composition. Therefore for me the term includes such things as dictation and written exercises as well as essays.

During the first two years of an English Course, because of the obvious limitations of students' knowledge, the scope of composition work will necessarily be very narrow, and, therefore, ample opportunity for writing English, in the form of dictations and exercises, must be provided. But even within the limitations imposed, in a first year it is possible to build up short essays of a very simple kind. The essential seems to me to provide a model which children can reproduce with minor variations and adaptations which will provide a very useful means of exercising and testing their knowledge of English. By means of question and answer a teacher can easily build up a composite picture of a boy or girl which refers to no individual and can be adapted by each child in the class to refer to himself. Such a picture might read as follows:—

> "My name is Ram Lal, and I am 11 years old. I am not very tall, but I am strong. I live at 65, Mahatma Gandhi Road with my mother and father. I have two brothers and one sister; my brothers are both older than I am, but my sister is younger. I go to the N. M. V. High School, and I am in the 8th standard."

This should be written up on the blackboard, and each child should then write it out with appropriate personal variations. The class could also be asked to write the description in the third person, beginning "His name is........" or in the feminine form "Her name is........"

Similarly at this stage by the same technique of question and answer, a picture of a child's daily programme can be built up as soon as pupils are familiar with the use of the Habitual Present:

> "I get up every day at 6 o'clock. After my bath,
> I have breakfast and go to school........", and so on.

As in the previous case, each pupil should then write this description with appropriate personal modifications. Other exercises would be to write it in the future and in the past.

Even in the very early stages, pupils should receive training in the exact description of objects and places familiar to them. So in a first year a simple but precise description of a classroom or a school building or a house could be attempted, and such descriptions could be supplemented by others of straightforward pictures, or of a series of simple pictures telling a story.

Story-telling through pictures may lead on in the second year to story reproduction. The stories used must necessarily be very simple and use, as far as possible, only structures and vocabulary already familar to pupils; exceptionally a key word, such as "well" or "will" may have to be introduced. The teacher should write the

story out for himself in order to avoid complicating things for pupils by offering two or three slightly differing versions of it. He should tell the story once as vividly as possible, making use of gestures and blackboard sketches to explain any difficulties. Then the story should be read through again from beginning to end, before pupils are asked to reconstruct it by means of question and answer; they should be allowed to write down only any unfamiliar words used. The final stage of the exercise is, of course, the writing down of the story by the pupils, either in class or at home. Aesop's fables and similar animal stories are excellent material for reproduction of this kind.

Apart from story reproduction, in a second year children should be asked to write accurate descriptions of familiar objects and scenes—The view from the classroom window, Animals I see on the way to school, The school playing-fields, etc. A further useful exercise is the description of simple actions or operations—How to make a paper aeroplane, How to make a fruit salad, How to clean a pair of shoes. I find that the best way to teach children the need for accuracy is to ask them to tell me how to perform some simple action, like putting on a coat, following the directions given, but wilfully misunderstanding when they are not precise. A child may say "Pick up your coat," whereupon I pick it up by the tail; or he may say "Put your arm into the sleeve," whereupon I put my right arm into the left sleeve—and so on.

A composition need not be long and children should be given a lot of opportunity for writing brief accurate descriptions of people, places and things, based upon their texts, their surroundings or upon specially chosen pictures. A very useful composition exercise that can be introduced during a second year and used a great deal in succeeding years is one in which children are asked to state the similarities and differences between two things, for example, a table and a chair, or an orange and a banana. Here again, the emphasis will naturally fall upon accuracy of description. In subsequent years the exercise can easily assume more complicated forms; children can be asked to deal, for example, with newspaper and magazine, lorry and car, picture and photograph, astronomy and astrology, etc. etc.

During a second year certain norms for composition work should be firmly established. The first and most important is that children should never be asked to write anything which has not been very carefully prepared beforehand in the classroom orally. This oral preparation is important, because it gives the teacher an opportunity for organising his pupils' ideas for marshalling

them into some sort of order. It is equally important because during this oral preparation he can make sure that his pupils are equipped with the proper vocabulary; if they are not, they will fly to a dictionary, which they are not usually capable of using properly, or they will guess and invent. The second important norm is that the material for composition must all be drawn from the child's own experience, either experience that the teacher gives him in the form of stories or pictures, or the experience gained by him in his everyday life. It follows that the subjects dealt with must be as concrete in character as possible, and that abstract topics and generalisations should be avoided. For example, it is obviously preferable to ask a child to write about "My Best Friend" than to demand an essay on "Friendship". "An Ambitious Man" is manifestly preferable to "Ambitions". The latter titles will in any case produce only a series of outworn platitudes, whereas the former may result in something personal and interesting. Children usually prefer subjects of a concrete nature and will write much more freely than if we demand of them the expression of unfelt generalisation. Anybody who has attended a Declamation Contest will agree that only boredom on all sides can result from asking children to give their views on some general topic, about which they are in any case too immature to have any real opinion.

In the more advanced years of an English Course, as the pupils' knowledge of the language grows and as their minds develop, it will obviously be possible to tackle more ambitious subjects, but I have always found that, unless there is very careful control by the teacher, students tend to develop the habit of writing loosely, of using words imprecisely. The difficulty often arises because insufficient attention is being paid to the problem of ensuring that pupils learn properly and even confidently the various elements in their rapidly expanding vocabulary. There is need at this stage for a lot of exercise material and oral work, designed to consolidate vocabulary. But apart from work of this kind, there is also much to be done in this direction in the composition class. Pupils should still be asked to write exact descriptions of people and places familiar to them, to give instructions for performing simple operations and to reproduce stories. Very profitable use can be made of other school subjects by asking children to describe an experiment in chemistry, to do a geometrical problem, to write about an historical incident, in English.

I strongly feel that one of the major mistakes being made in the field of English teaching in India at the present time is in the prescription of books of essays for study by students who are not

equipped to deal with them and who are, moreover, simply not interested in them. The essay is, after all, a very specialised form of writing, often deeply personal in character and style, and frequently intricate in vocabulary and construction. Students who endeavour, with their poor equipment, to *imitate* the manner and style of the good English essayists usually produce slovenly writing, imprecise in its use of vocabulary and lamentably defective in its use of grammar. The desire to offer good models of English prose is a laudable one, but I see no reason why preference should always be given to the essay, and would much rather offer to students good examples of accurate descriptive writing as models to be imitated. Every competent English teacher should be able to make for himself, from his own reading, a small anthology of useful descriptive pieces, many of which would have to be simplified before presentation to students. Each piece would have to be reproduced in some way, probably on the blackboard, so that the whole class could see it simultaneously. The teacher would read it through, disposing of any difficulties of vocabulary or structure before proceeding to a simple analysis of the piece. If the passage were, for example, a description of a man, it should be possible, by means of question and answer, to establish that it consists of a number of sections relating to (a) physical characteristics (height, age, etc), (b) clothes, (c) manner, (d) life and so on. These sections could be marked by the use of coloured chalks. After such an analysis, pupils might be asked to write a similar description of a real or any imaginary person, observing the same division into sections as in the original.

Obviously at all stages in the writing of compositions the problems of punctuation and paragraphing will have to be dealt with. There is no reason to postpone treatment of these problems until the last years of an English Course, since even in a first year it is possible to deal adequately with such signs as the capital letter, the full stop, the comma, the question mark, the exclamation mark and inverted commas—and these are all that a schoolchild needs really to be able to use. Similarly, the second-year text will normally be divided up into paragraphs, which should allow the teacher to introduce his pupils to the idea of dividing written work up into self-contained sections. In subsequent years, the rudimentary ideas on these two topics acquired in the early stages can easily be developed.

WHY A SYLLABUS?

BY L. A. HILL

Professor of English Language, University of London

I WAS very interested in Dr. Michael West's two penetrating articles on syllabuses in your August 1955 issue, since I have been working on syllabuses for the past 8 years, and am now closely concerned with the one being prepared by the Indonesian Ministry of Education. I hope that the experiences that drove me to investigate syllabuses may be of some interest to your readers.

Nine years ago, I was teaching in a certain country in Asia where various series of very well-known modern text-books were being used for the teaching of English in the schools. The pupils were given a six-year course in English, with anything from three to six hours a week. Yet, at the end of that time the command of English of a large majority of them was equivalent only to that which the text-books expected from a pupil beginning his third year of studies. My colleagues and I were called upon to administer tests, based on the material in the books used in the schools, to large numbers of ex-pupils every year, so that striking contrast between theory and practice was very forcibly brought home to us: the pupils were certainly getting through the full course of books; but they were getting a command of very little of the contents.

We tried to find out why this was. We found that the salaries of teachers were very low, so that nearly all of them had to do extra work to make both ends meet. Most of them consequently had no time to prepare drills with which to drive home the new points contained in each lesson. In fact, many did not even have time to find out what all the new points were, since for each lesson this meant making a careful comparison with all previous lessons to see whether the text-book writer was bringing in new meanings or uses of words or structures already introduced with other meanings or uses; or even completely new structures which had not previously been introduced in any form. The teachers were therefore mostly ploughing through the books mechanically, adding nothing and taking nothing away, translating or brushing aside any expression that caused difficulty.

Obviously we could do nothing about the teachers' salaries; and in any case a drastic revision of these would probably have

dislocated the finances of the country. We therefore decided to go through some of the text-books to (a) list the new teaching points (i.e. points which required a new learning effort from pupils with the linguistic background of the country we were in), so that the teacher could know what he was supposed to be teaching in each lesson ; and (b) make drills by which the pupils could gain command of these new points. We began analysing the first book of one of the most widely used courses, but by the time we had got half-way through, we had found such a mass of new points in almost every lesson, and such a lack of any identifiable plan or grading in introducing them, that we gave up, believing we had found at least two reasons why pupils were achieving such poor results: the pupils' brains were being flooded with a mass of new points instead of being presented with one point at a time; and there was not sufficient building up of new points on the foundation of old ones. We decided that text-book writers ought to supply an appendix or guide, in which all the teaching points in each lesson were explicitly stated, so that the persons responsible for choosing text-books for the schools could judge for themselves whether a course was suitable for their requirements or not. We did not attempt to analyse other courses, since the results achieved by pupils using them did not appear to differ from those achieved by pupils using the course we had examined, and we were not therefore willing to devote more time and energy to this irksome task.

Instead we began work on a syllabus to show teachers what points needed to be covered. Isolated as we were, we did not know what people in other countries were doing about these problems; and transfers soon split us up. Later, an opportunity presented itself for me to see what the Department of Education of the University of London was doing in the field of English as a foreign language, and I there discovered that the staff were engaged on just the problem that had faced us. Their solution was, roughly, to take a descriptive statement of the structure of English, break it up into small sections, each consisting of one teaching point, and grade these sections so that the more difficult could be taught on the basis of the easier. In this way the teacher could see exactly what he was doing and where he was at any given point, and he could make sure that he was not over-looking important parts of the structure of the language. Later still, I was asked by the Indonesian Ministry of Education to help in the preparation of a syllabus they were planning along the lines of the Australian one for migrants and the Madras one.

The Indonesian syllabus consists of teaching steps, each divided into four columns: in the first column the teacher is told what the main teaching point of the step is; in the second he is given examples; in the third the new vocabulary is listed; in the fourth, there are new meanings or uses of words or structures introduced in earlier steps. To give a hypothetical example, *back* would appear in Column 3 rather early in the course with the meaning it has in *the back of a chair*, *my back*, etc. Somewhere much later, it would appear again in Column 4, with the meaning it has in *the children are back from school.* Incidentally, in one well-known text-book, *back* in the first meaning I mention above appears early in the course, and then is not mentioned again; but considerably later the sentence *the children are back from school* suddenly appears without warning or preparation!

In the preparation of the Indonesian syllabus, Dr. West's "General Service List of English Words" and Mr. Hornby's "Guide to Patterns and Usage in English" proved of very great help.

A syllabus is, of course, only a skeleton. To clothe the Indonesian one, the following are being prepared :—

(1) Short teachers' guides, which give brief advice on the presentation of each new point to Indonesian pupils; warnings against possible confusions; references to other steps where the teacher can find points which fit in with the one he is teaching at the moment; and advice on pronunciation (including weak forms and intonation).

(2) Books of drills and exercises giving the teacher the types of drill or exercise he can use in teaching each point, with lists of vocabulary that can be used in each. Cumulative revision drills are included.

(3) Readers, based in the early stages on scenes familiar and interesting to the Indonesian pupil of the relevant age-group.

(4) Writing exercises for home work.

(5) A descriptive statement of the phonological, morphological and syntactical structure of the English language for teachers and advanced pupils to use as a reference book when one is wanted.

One of the problems in producing a syllabus is to help the writers of the reading-pieces to make them interesting. The plan in Indonesia was to make a preliminary draft of the syllabus, then to draft reading-pieces which followed the syllabus closely, but were allowed to depart from it in places where interest

demanded it; and finally to come to a compromise between the needs of interest and those of grading before making the final versions of syllabus and reading-pieces.

It is planned that the Indonesian syllabus should be treated as experimental: teachers using it will be encouraged to send in constructive criticisms and suggestions for consideration by the Ministry. Those accepted will be incorporated in revised editions, which it is planned to publish yearly at first.

The syllabus will be treated in different ways at different stages in the development of the English teaching in the country: while most teachers are overworked and unable to take much initiative, they will lean heavily on the aids provided by the syllabus. When better days come, and the teachers have the leisure and the experience to prepare their own lessons, the syllabus can become merely an inventory of what will be expected of the pupils at the State examinations at the different stages.

I shall now try to draw a few conclusions from the experiences I have related above. Firstly, I think Dr. West is only partly right when he suggests that nationalism is behind the sudden interest in syllabuses. I think I have shown that the syllabuses may, in part at least, be an attempt to find something to replace text-books with which Departments of Education were not satisfied for perfectly sound educational reasons. I have tried to explain why these text-books did not satisfy in some areas, but even if my reasons are the wrong ones, the fact that they were not successful remains. It is, of course, no use blaming overworked, underpaid teachers: they are part of the conditions a text-book must be designed to cater for.

Secondly, syllabuses are designed to enable Departments of Education to protect teachers and pupils from text-books which (a) omit important items of the structure of English; or (b) slip them in without warning, so that they confuse pupils and embarrass teachers who have not had time to prepare their lessons thoroughly enough to spot such traps; or (c) add large numbers of rare and unimportant items, which interfere with the pupils' achieving command of more essential things; or (d) arrange the items of the structure of the language so haphazardly that, for instance, the pupil is not able to get one thing fixed in his mind before something else which conflicts with it and thus confuses him comes along.

My third conclusion is that, if a text-book writer is now confident that he has produced a new series of text-books which will be successful in the far from ideal conditions in which they will have to be used in large parts of the world, he should

remember these facts: a buyer is a fool if he does not carry out a thorough inspection of the merchandise offered for sale to him before he buys it; and the seller is not much better if he has really good merchandise but hides his light under a bushel. Departments of Education want to know what they are buying: it is no good publishers sending sample copies to them unless they send with them a full inventory of contents i.e. a *detailed Syllabus* showing every last thing that is introduced in the course, and in what order the various points are introduced; and furthermore, an explanation of what is done to help the teacher to give his pupils a real command of these points. A text-book consisting of reading-pieces, each preceded by a list of words and phrases and followed by a few questions and/or exercises is suspect: that is the normal pattern of the failures: it may hide a really careful grading and presentation of the devices which, as Professor Fries says (*The Structure of English,* p. 56) "signal structural meaning"; or it may pay only lip-service to the principles of careful grading and presentation; or it may ignore them completely. Only a detailed inventory can show. It is, I consider, in the vital interests of expert text-book writers to make their own syllabuses. That is their most effective weapon today.

Fourthly, I suggest much closer liaison between buyers and sellers, i.e. between text-book writers and publishers on one side, and Departments of Education and teachers on the other. The sort of liaison that, I believe, achieves little is the visit of an official of a publishing house who may be an excellent business-man but is unable to discuss the modern technicalities of language-teaching, to a Ministry official who has an intimate knowledge of his teachers' needs and of rival ways of satisfying them.

Fifthly, Dr. West states that the expert text-book writers are "unwilling to be ordered by anyone to do anything different from what they have done," but surely the boot is on the other foot: nobody is ordering them to do anything; what is happening is that the users of text-books are becoming "unwilling to be ordered by anyone to do anything different from what they think is good for them." Nobody orders the big toy manufacturers to make certain types of toys and not others. They are free to produce what the customer wants or what he does not; but if they insist on their rights not "to do anything different from what they have done," they must not be surprised if the customer simply exercises his equally valid right not to buy what does not appeal to him.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Learning Modern Languages, F. M. Hodgson, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1955.

MRS. HODGSON, who is at present a Lecturer in Modern Languages at the University of London Institute of Education and was previously a teacher in a number of English Grammar Schools, has produced a first-class book on the general topics of the teaching and the learning of modern languages. While she deals only with general issues and not with specific teaching problems, and while she is concerned with the teaching of French and German to English schoolchildren, her conclusions and her advice are equally applicable in other different situations.

The writer opens her book with an enquiry into the case of the non-linguistic child, who, in spite of four or five years' study of a foreign language, is at the end of them incapable of expressing even simple ideas correctly in it. She points out that every child possesses a potential linguistic ability, since he is able to master and use his native language adequately for his own needs. The fault might, therefore, be reasonably attributed to the teaching methods usually employed. Many teachers pay lip service to the general principles of Direct Method teaching and employ modern methods successfully in the early stages only to abandon them at a later stage in favour of grammar and translation. "It is unfortunate that the valuable work done by the pioneers who made so great a contribution to the reform of modern language teaching in the early years of the century should have been brought into disrepute through exaggeration and through the effort of others who failed to understand that the method of approach advocated, properly used, represented a severe discipline requiring much more effort and concentration on the part of the learner than the methods used earlier. One of the assumptions made by those who are opposed to a direct approach to language as such is that such an approach is incompatible with strict accuracy and grammatical correctness. It is an assumption which has no basis in fact." The book is full of unequivocal statements of this kind, which are obviously the reflection of deep conviction, based on experience, on the part of the writer.

Mrs. Hodgson is a firm believer in the absolute necessity for structural control—"The slow process of trial and error which was inevitable in the learning of his native language can largely be eliminated by careful selection and grading of the material to

be mastered, by moving from the simple to the more complex step by step, from what is immediately related to the child's needs to what he will require later on, by ensuring that he meets the forms and structures of everyday experience over and over again in meaningful situations."

Mrs. Hodgson, in common with many other experts in Modern Language teaching, is convinced that any language must be presented to the learner as a living reality and not as a series of dry grammatical concepts or statements about the language. As she says, "these must be statements about the unknown until the language in question has to some extent been mastered." She further believes that a language must first be approached through its spoken forms—"familiarity with the articulated noises which constitute speech must be the prerequisite for any ability to write down these noises." She points out how frequently it happens that a child is able to reproduce grammatical forms in isolation with great accuracy, but cannot connect them in meaningful utterances. Having established her two fundamental beliefs trenchantly, Mrs. Hodgson goes on to apply them and their consequences to a number of different aspects of language learning. For example, in speaking about reading, she says—"In this field again the children give us all the evidence we need, and as they make mistake after mistake they are saying clearly that we are wasting their time and our own, that they cannot read what they cannot pronounce or understand........"

As readers will have seen, I have succumbed to the temptation to quote extensively from this book. That is at least some indication of the extent to which it is crammed with useful and necessary advice to those who teach a Modern Language.

QUESTION BOX

Question: What is the difference between the adverbs "fairly" and "rather"? Is it possible to say both "It is rather hot" and "It is fairly hot"?

Normally we use "fairly" with words describing qualities or concepts of which we approve: so we say:—

He's a fairly good player.
The sea was fairly calm.
He did the work fairly well.
The breeze is fairly strong.

Correspondingly, we use "rather" with words describing qualities or concepts of which we disapprove; so we say:—

That's rather expensive.
The work was rather difficult.

The journey was rather long.
I'm feeling rather tired.

There are, however, many circumstances when these words are used rather differently. We may, for example, say:—

This cake is rather good.

By using "rather" we indicate that we didn't expect the cake to be good and were surprised that it was. If we say:—

It was rather hot,

the implication is that we did not think heat was a good thing at that particular moment. In:—

He's rather tall,

there is the same underlying feeling of disapproval. So similarly we may say:—

It's fairly difficult.
It was raining fairly hard.

We may, therefore, use either "It's fairly hot" or "It's rather hot;" the difference, will lie in the attitude of approval or disapproval underlying the statement.

W. S. Allen's *Living English Structure* contains some very useful exercise material on this point.

Question: I have come across the expression "weak form" several times while reading about English pronunciation. What does it mean ?

"Weak" is used to describe the spoken form of a word in which in rapid speech the original full vowel is reduced to the neutral vowel ə. Most of the common words possessing a "strong" and a "weak" form are structural items, which, because they have no meaning content, tend to be slurred over in rapid speech. For example, in

I can do it if you can tell me how.

In both cases, because "can" is not accented, the weak form kən is used instead of the strong form kæn. Similarly in:—

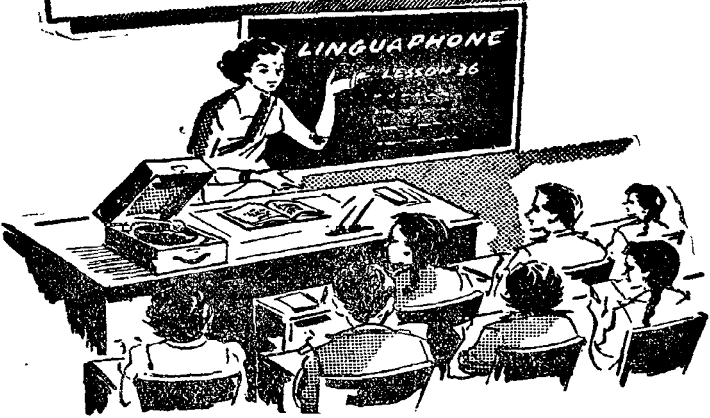
He arrived by train from Delhi yesterday; "from" is unimportant and is used in its weak form frəm and not in its strong form fræm.

Weak forms are usually used if such words occur in the body of a sentence. They are frequently found at the beginning of sentences and less commonly at the end.

References to weak forms and their use will be found in :—

D. Jones, *An Outline of English Phonetics,* Heffer.
I. C. Ward, *The Phonetics of English,* Heffer.
A. S. Hornby, *English by Radio,* Records: B. B. C.

first you listen



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